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Belleville

Industrial park key to future

By HARRY ORSCHELN
Press Staff Writer

BELLEVILLE — The economy of this community of 3,200 residents, noted for offering small-town living within a short driving distance of the industrial, commercial, financial and educational centers of southeastern Michigan, has stabilized, city officials say.

The 75-year-old city, however, is short on major industries and planners hope the rezoning in June of 107 acres for an industrial park will help increase the city's tax base.

Belleville officials hope to develop the property, on Savage between Sheldon and Sumpter south of the Norfolk and Western Railroad tracks, with a \$2 million federal grant which is pending.

The city already has used \$15,000 in grant monies for planning and promotion of the park.

"We have some potential builders and airport-related firms who have indicated interest in the park," says Burma Wertz, chairman of the Belleville planning commission.

"This could open up jobs for the area like it never has been opened before," Wertz says.

Residential expansion in the city has virtually stopped for a number of years, because there is no room to grow. The population has stayed close to 3,000 in the past ten years. The city is surrounded by Van Buren Township.

The annexation of township land

west of the city by Belleville in 1980 will allow about 120 new residences to be built.

Leona Van Buhler, executive secretary of the Belleville Chamber of Commerce, says the business district is "well stabilized."

"As far as business goes, it was down in 1980 just like everywhere, but the businesses stayed here," she says.

Van Buhler says one doctor's office and a convenience store opened in the downtown area in 1980 and a shopping center on Sumpter added six businesses.

City government has not made any service cuts, according to Agnes Frisch, city clerk. No service cuts are expected this year, she says.

City council did approve a 1-mill increase in property taxes, but city officials say most of that will be offset by the discontinuance of a 1 percent surtax on taxes the city collects for the state, county and township.

For the future, Belleville planners hope to transform the Main to Liberty downtown district into a pedestrian shopping mall with old business storefronts updated, Wertz says.

The city also is planning on providing an area for senior citizens.

Officials will continue to try to attract industrial development to provide more employment to its residents.

"We want to make Belleville a place where residents work, shop and live," Wertz says.

Ypsi CofC optimistic about area

By RANDI WEINER
Press Staff Writer

When the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce was born 60 years ago, the United States was in the Roaring '20s — the wild and booming years of flappers, flivvers, the first taste of jazz and bootleg gin.

Nowadays the roaring has silenced and the outlook is called grim by some economic advisors — when they are feeling optimistic.

But for the chamber, grim is a word reserved for the authors of fairy tales.

The job of the chamber is to promote and advance commercial, industrial, professional and civic interests in the area. It is a civic clearing house, public relations counselor, legislative representative at the local, state and national levels of government, an information bureau and a research and promotion medium. Its objective is community development.

"And I think we do a damn good job for a community our size," said Merritt Martin, executive vice president of the chamber.

"Of course, there's always room for improvement," he said.

The chamber currently has 440 members, up from the 1979 total of 342. That alone could account for Martin's enthusiasm.

But the chamber has not been sleeping during 1980, even though it would be easy enough to give in to the recession and take a break.

Projects getting starts or ending in 1980 included the

bureau has a budget of \$70,000 and there is "miscellaneous income" Martin said contributes between \$25,000 and \$50,000 to the chamber. The miscellaneous income includes such diverse things as grants and program admissions.

The area lost two industries in 1980: Norris Industries and St. Regis Paper Co. Martin said the chamber was working with a real estate agent to locate new industries to rent the buildings, but so far there have been few nibbles.

Martin said the recession "has hurt the business community. Well, I think generally all businesses who are members are in one way or another affected — reduced profits is one side. Business owners are telling me they have had to tighten their own belts and be much more careful with employment. In the long run, I think it will strengthen business because

the private enterprise system has a way of rebounding."

A way the recession has helped the area is making people spend money closer to home instead of driving long distances. Gas prices have made homebodies of most shoppers.

In January 1981 the chamber and the Ypsilanti Area Industrial Development Corp. merged. The YAIDC will remain functionally intact with the same operating procedures and budget but the chamber will assume full responsibility for all YAIDC contractual obligations.

The YAIDC had been the umbrella corporation — the central contracting agency — of a nonprofit corporation representing a service area that included Augusta, Superior, Pittsfield and Ypsilanti townships and the city of Ypsilanti.

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